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## NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release:

Friday, April 1, 2011

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# Virginia Celebrates Fair Housing Month

*Fair housing office promotes the right to “Live Free” from discrimination*

**RICHMOND**—An apartment complex allows non-disabled tenants to park in assigned handicapped parking spaces. A homeowners’ association imposes overly restrictive rules to prevent children from playing outside. A property manager doubles the rent for an interracial couple and makes sexual advances toward the female tenant. The Virginia Fair Housing Office brings these and other discrimination cases under the Fair Housing Act, which celebrates its 43<sup>rd</sup> anniversary this month.

Congress enacted the landmark civil rights legislation April 11, 1968, and each April the nation honors the occasion by rededicating itself to equal housing opportunities for all. This year’s Fair Housing Month theme—**Live Free**—reminds us that discrimination has no home in America. Everyone deserves the right to live free from housing discrimination.

“People often assume housing discrimination applies only to bigoted remarks or overt refusals to rent or sell,” says Mary Broz Vaughan, spokesperson for the Virginia Fair Housing Office. “But fair housing laws also protect people with disabilities and families with children, so they can live free from more subtle forms of discrimination.”

The Fair Housing Act prohibits housing discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, and familial status (families with children under age 18). In addition, Virginia’s Fair Housing Law—which celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year in 2012—further protects “elderliness,” individuals age 55 or older, from housing discrimination. The law protects people from bias when trying to rent an apartment, buy a house, obtain a mortgage, or purchase homeowner’s insurance. Fair housing requirements apply to all housing providers – property managers, owners, landlords, real estate agents, banks, savings institutions, credit unions, insurance companies, mortgage lenders, and appraisers.

The Fair Housing Board administers and enforces the Fair Housing Law, although the Real Estate Board is responsible for fair housing cases involving real estate licensees or their employees. Each Board investigates housing discrimination through the Fair Housing Office, which receives an average of 180 complaints each year. The greatest number of complaints involves racial discrimination, but disability and familial status complaints continue to rise.

**Individuals who believe they may be victims of housing discrimination should contact the Virginia Fair Housing Office toll-free at 1-888-551-FAIR (3247).** The agency also offers free informational seminars to housing consumers and providers who wish to learn more about their rights and responsibilities under the Fair Housing Act.

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